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Free Health Checkups For Children* Please Enter

HE 22.2:

*Early, Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment, Medicaid

Every parent knows that healthy children are happy children. They do better in school. They keep up with their playmates. They grow normally. But sometimes it's hard for a parent to tell if there's anything wrong with a child. You might think that a child who's having trouble reading just isn't trying hard enough. But the child *may* have a vision problem. You might think that a child who behaves badly just won't listen. But *maybe* the child can't hear you.

The fact is that children from poor families tend to have more health problems than children from middle class families. In general, they have more hearing and dental problems, more digestive and urinary tract infections, and lose more time from school because of chronic illness.

This does not have to be. Most problems that children have can be prevented or controlled through regular and complete checkups received from infancy on through the teenage years. Through regular care, problems can be caught early, even before you become aware that something is wrong, and before minor problems have a chance to become major ones.

What Is A Complete Checkup?

A full checkup for a baby is not the same as a full checkup for a teenager. Up to the age of 5, your child requires a series of regularly scheduled shots to prevent such childhood diseases as diptheria, measles, tuberculosis, and polio. At each periodic checkup, the doctor will look at the child's eyes, ears, nose, throat and teeth, and will weigh and measure the child. The doctor will listen to your child's heart and lungs, check arms, legs, and muscular development, and feel the stomach. He or she will also check the child's overall growth and emotional development. Sometimes the doctor will take a drop of blood from the child's finger and test it for certain diseases.

If the general checkup shows anything wrong, the doctor will tell you and explain the necessary treatment.

Who Will Pay For It?

If your family is eligible for Medicaid, your children can get free regular medical checkups from any doctor you choose who participates in your state's Medicaid program. Checkups are also available free at some community health centers and from most public health clinics. The services you receive are paid for through joint programs of the state and federal governments.

If you are not eligible for Medicaid, your children may still be able to get free or low cost checkups at a nearby clinic. Someone at your local health department may be able to tell you about these resources.

For families who receive Medicaid, treatment of problems discovered in the regular checkup is usually covered by Medicaid. If the prescribed treatment is not covered by the Medicaid plan in your state, your Medicaid or welfare worker can refer you to a doctor who may be willing to give the prescribed care at little or no cost to the family.

How Do I Find A Doctor?

If you do not have a family doctor, someone at your Medicaid agency or health department can help you find one by giving you the names, addresses, and phone numbers of doctors and clinics in your area who participate in Medicaid.

If the doctor you choose cannot give all the tests that are required in the full screening, your social worker or nurse can give you the name of a doctor or clinic where they can be done. *But it's up to you to ask.*

If You Have Trouble Getting To The Doctor

Many families have trouble making and keeping appointments. Clinics and doctors' offices are sometimes

far from home and hard to get to. Once you get there, there may be a long wait, and there may be no one at home to look after the other children.

If you can, try to find a family doctor or clinic close to home to eliminate some of these problems, and so you can establish a regular relationship.

If you still have problems with appointments, *ask for help.* New Medicaid rules say that the agency *must* provide help with transportation and appointment scheduling *if you ask for it.* And some agencies can help you find child care if you need it.

My Children Just Had Complete Checkups For School. They Don't Need Another One So Soon.

Probably not. But they will need another one sometime within the next few years. The important point is that children receive regular checkups, preventive care, and treatment throughout childhood.

Remember, as long as you are eligible for Medicaid, your children can get free regular checkups and treatment for any problems that are found.

Every child has the right to a healthy future, and Parents who seek regular preventive care for their children are acting to protect that right.

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